RAJYA SABHA

Friday, the 26th July, 1985|4 Sravana 1907 (Saka)

The House met at eleven of the clock, **Mr. Chairman** in the Chair.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Loss due to floods in Kerala

*61. SHRI N. E. BALARAM:†

SHRI K. MOHANAN :

Will the Minister of AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT be pleased to state :

(a) whether Government's attention has been drawn to the huge loss of life and property and crops in Kerala caused by the heavy monsoons in the State recently, and also by landslides and sea erosion;

(b) if so, what are the details in this regard; and

(c) whether any financial help has been extended to the State for relief measures, if so, what are the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT (SHRI BUTA SINGH): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) According to the State Government, 102 human lives, 3042 cattle heads and 1,53,800 poultry have been lost. About 1.46 lakhs ha. cropped area, 146 lakhs population and 900 villages have been affected. 4.78 lakhs houses have been damaged. In addition, a number of fishermen have lost their boats, nets, etc. 7337 Kms. of PWD roads and 34153 Kms. of Rural roads have been affected.

(c) The Government of India have so far sanctioned Ways and Means Advance of Rs. 25.00 crores to the State Government for carrying out the relief and rehabilitation work in the affected areas. The State Government also submitted a Memorandum on 6-7-1985. The Central Team visited the State from 16th to 19th July, 1985. On receipt of the Report of the Central Team, further action will be taken for sanctioning the Central Assistance.

SHRI N. E. BALARAM: Mr. Chairman, Sir, the loss suffered by Kerala in reeent floods, landslides and erosion due to high tidal waves was unprecedented. As far as my knowledge goes, the Government of Kerala itself was not able to fully estimate the cattle loss that has occurred to that State. They have only made a temporary assessment about the losses and on the basis of that, I understand, they have already submitted two memoranda to the Government of India. Even now the State is suffering on account of these things because 150 k.m. length of coastal line was completely affected by the tidal waves. It is very vulnerable area. Unless immediate protective steps are taken by the State Government with the help of the Central Government, the damage will be much more in the coming period. Therefore, I would like to know from the hon. Minister what was the request made by the Kerala Government in those two Memoranda and what steps have been taken by the Central Government.

SHRI BUTA SINGH : Sir, as I mentioned towards the end of part (c) of my answer, the State Government sent a detailed memorandum. During the visit of the Central team, the Memorandum was gone over in cooperation with the State Administration, the district authorities etc. The Ministers and even the some hon. Members of Parliament were involved. Now the Central Team's report is awaited. The Memorandum sent by the Kerala Government has been scrutinised in cooperation with the State Government and adequate ways and means assistance was provided by the Central Government. The final decision is awaited. As soon as the report is received and the high-level committee goes over it, we will issue final sanction for assistance.

†The question was actually asked on the floor of the House by Shri N. E. Balaram.

MR. CHAIRMAN : The Member wants to know how much assistance will the Kerala Government request in their memoranda.

SHRI N. E. BALARAM : How much was the assistance sought by ...

MR. CHAIRMAN : I have put the question for you. Have you got the answer?

SHRI BUTA SINGH : Sir, there are two memoranda which were submitted by the Government of Kerala earlier. Then the second assessment was made at the time when the Central team visited the State. Now, Sir, that memorandum is hardly relevant because the Central Team is going to scrutinise and then a final decision will be taken by the high level committee. I am sorry...

MR. CHAIRMAN: He does not have the figures.

SHRI N. E. BALARAM: I can give some information to the Minister if it is not available with him.

MR. CHAIRMAN : That is not the procedure.

SHRI BUTA SINGH : I am sorry for this sort of a thing.

SHRI N. E. BALARAM : The Government of Kerala has already made a request...

SHRI BUTA SINGH : I have the figures with me and I am prepared to give them but it will not be of any use. Initially, it was Rs. 675.06 crores and then the figure was Rs. 743.36 crores. But as I said, it will not be of any substance. The memorandum will be scrutinised by the Central Committee in co-operation with the State Government and then a final decision taken. If the hon. Member is happy with these statistics, yes, they are here.

SHRI N. E. BALARAM : Relief and rehabilitation is the immediate need; it cannot wait because, as I have given the instance, about 142 kilometres of coastal line has become vulnerable because of tidal attack. It is going on even now. Unless immediate steps are taken, there are going to be more damages. There are two teams that visited Kerala and they have already submitted a report to the Central level committee and they are going to finalise it. But I would like to know from the hon. Minister, can't you give immediate relief of about Rs. 600 crores? That is the rough estimate. Can't you give that immediately so that relief measures could be undertaken? As far as Kerala Government is concerned, they are in severe financial crisis; everybody knows it. They are not able to undertake any relief work. Can't the Central Government immediately intervene?

SHRI BUTA SINGH : As this hon. House is very well aware, there is a system under which the whole thing works. There is margin money available with the State. Then on receipt of the memorandum the Central Government also released assistance on immediate basis to meet the immediate requirements for relief and rehabilitation. Then as recommended by the Eighth Finance Commission, accepted by the Government, there is a procedure. The memorandum is scrutinised; assessment is made, and then based on that, the whole thing goes to the high-level committee and then final sanction is given. But I do not agree with the hon. Member that immediate relief was inadequate. I must say—firstly I must congratulate the Kerala Administration, and also the Chief Minister who, perhaps, was the first among the earliest people to arrive at the places which were affected by this calamity, and then the State Administration, the District Administration, for the quickest relief measures taken. I have seen them in Kerala. I have myself gone to some of the camps where relief is provided to the victims. These camps are very well managed, most hygienically maintained and the food served is of quite good quality. I visited a few camps myself along with the Chief Minister; I met the people; I enquired from them. The relief measures taken are adequate. And there is no lack of funds. Whatever the State Government had asked for, in the first instance, we released Rs. 10 crores and on the second instance, when hon. Members from Kerala along with the Kerala Chief Min-

ister met the hon. Prime Minister, immediately another sum of Rs. 15 crores was sanctioned on the spot and money was released the same day. So, I do not agree with the hon. Member that inadequate relief had been given. Adequate relief was given to the people in Kerala and they are being looked after very well by the State Government.

SHRI N. E. BALARAM : I know that he has already sanctioned Rs. 25 crores. I do not deny it. But what can they do with Rs. 25 crores? Even the hon. Minister might have seen; he has visited the area. About 150 kilometre length of coastal line has been completely damaged by floods. Unless you release huge amounts of money, they cannot do it; they cannot prevent tidal waves to come. That must be done immediately. You cannot wait for the committee's decision; they may take one month more but the tidal waves will not wait. That is the point. What are you going to do about it?

SHRI BUTA SINGH : Even if we provide the entire amount asked for by the Kerala State and if the hon. Member goes there, he will not be able to touch the ground for at least a fortnight. Water is still standing; there is 8 to 10 feet of water. What can you do? Can you discover from inside the water, from the bottom of it and repair the road and spread it like a carpet? You will have to wait. And for immediate relief to the victims, as I said, there is not a single case where the hon. Member can point out that a family or a person has been left in lurch, or it has not been provided adequate relief. In regard to long-term measures, hon. Members will agree with me that we will have to go by the norms and we will have to see also whether the conditions on the ground permit us to undertake repair works. For example, in the case of the national highways, village roads etc., some of them may not be there; as soon as the waters recede, perhaps, most of them will not be there, because, the floods which Kerala has faced this time is an unprecedented one. Specially, in the case of sea erosion. Where can you get that road which has been taken away by sea? All these things will have to be taken into account. I can assure the hon. House, specially from the Government of India side and the State Government, we will not be found lacking in tackling this problem which has been created by the floods, sea erosion or landslides and which has affected the people of Kerala. Our full sympathy is with them.

SHRI K. MOHANAN : Sir, as my friend, Mr. Balaram and the hon. Minister have rightly pointed out, the monsoon and the flood damage this season in Kerala is an unprecedented one. Seventy-six lives have been lost. Seven thousand and four hundred have been injured. Fifty-two per cent of the population of the State has been affected by the floods. We will have to provide rehabilitation assistance to nearly nine lakh families. This is the gravity of the flood damage. I am glad to note that the hon. Minister himself visited the State and saw for himself the intensity and the gravity of the flood damage there.

As far as my Government is concerned, it is on the verge of pauperisation. We are asking for more and more funds, to rehabilitate the people who have been affected. In this connection, I would like to know from the hon. Minister whether the Government would consider this as a calamity, a rare calamity and extend assistance beyond the stipulated norms. If so, to what extent?

My second question is, whether the Government would consider giving the entire expenditure in excess of margin money as grant? Now, as per the stipulated norms, only 75 per cent is given as grant. I would like to know from the hon. Minister, taking into account the peculiar situation in Kerala, whether the Government would consider giving the entire expenditure, in excess of the margin money as grant.

SHRI BUTA SINGH: I agree with the hon. Member's first point that the calamity is of a very rare severity. In regard to his second point, this is a suggestion for action and I will difinitely take note of it.

SHRI M. M. JACOB: Sir, hon. Members have expressed their concern and the

hon. Minister has replied to them. The calamity is vast and devastating. I am very happy, therefore, that the Government of India has come in a big way just at the time of the calamity to give immediate relief. My question is, whether it is possible for the Government to waive the normal rules of assistance? For example, if a house collapses, you have a pattern of assistance in regard to a house collapse, which has been fixed ten or fifteen years back; Rs. 75 or Rs. 100 for a house reconstruction. If crops are lost, there is a normal pattern of assistance, which has also been fixed about ten or fifteen years back. But this pattern of assistance is not adequate today, because of the enormous cost escalation. Many houses have collapsed. The figures are given in the memorandum. I would request the hon. Minister to find out whether it is possible to revise the norms, the pattern of assistance, fixed for each head, taking into account the increase in costs.

SHRI BUTA SINGH : Sir, as of today, we are governed by the norms already laid down by the successive Finance Commissions and the practice which is already in vogue in regard to other States. But as I mentioned, I have already constituted a committee under the chairmanship of the Agricultural Secretary to go over the earlier codes, famine codes and other provisions relating to calamities and suggest how best we can make them relevant to the present situation. But Sir, under the present norms, I am afraid, it is not very much in my hands that I can relax the norms. All I can do is, I have taken note of the suggestions of the hon. Members. I agree with the hon. Members that this calamity is of a very rare intensity and severity. As I said, the Government will take into consideration the suggestions made by hon. Members.

SHRI B. KRISHNA MOHAN : Sir, we have noticed that there is a huge loss of property and crops not only in Kerala but also in Punjab and Assam.

MR. CHAIRMAN : No, no, not relevant.

SHRI B. KRISHNA MOHAN : Just I am putting about Kerala only. In view of the losses sustained by the Kerala people will the Government consider desirability of extending financial assistance not only to Kerala but to the rest of the States where...

MR. CHAIRMAN : No, no. Please sit down. Yes, Mr. Thomas.

SHRI THOMAS KUTHIRAVATTOM: The ceilings of expenditure fixed by the Government of India for crops etc. are those fixed long ago. At present the actual cost is several times higher on account of rise in prices of seeds, sapplings, fertilizer, labour cost and such other agricultural inputs. Compared to other States the cost escalation in Kerala is too high. There the agriculture is more labour oriented. Will the Government of India, therefore, consider raising the ceiling of expenditure and make it in tune with the present high cost, and extend assistance to Kerala accordingly?

SHRI BUTA SINGH : This was covered by me in my earlier answer.

SHRI V. GOPALSAMY : Sir, the problem of floods in Kerala is a serious one, but there has been a persistent demand from Tamil Nadu...

MR. CHAIRMAN : No, no, not relevant.

SHRI V. GOPALSAMY : This is about flood. This is very important.

MR. CHAIRMAN : No, no. Next question. (*Interruptions*).

SHRI RAOOF VALIULLAH : This really deserves to be answered.

MR. CHAIRMAN : Unfortunately, rules do not permit. The hon. Member has to give prior intimation. (*Interruptions*).

SHRI RAOOF VALIULLAH : What if we have a letter of authority.

MR. CHAIRMAN : You should have submitted it to me earlier.

*62. [*The questioner (Shri Ramanand Yadav) was absent. For answer* vide *Cols.* 27-28 infra].